

California's Bold Step: Using Social Marketing To Increase Public Participation in the Arts

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Social marketing seeks behavior change. If your children have ever asked you to 'buckle up for safety,' you've been social marketed. If your best friend has shamed you when he discovered you don't recycle, you've been social marketed. If you think of Smokey the Bear when you throw earth on your campfire, you're responding to social marketing.

As a methodology, social marketing was developed and continues to be used extensively in public health to address smoking, HIV prevention, teenage drug use, domestic violence, drunk driving and so forth. Can the same technique be used to promote awareness of the arts as a public benefit and to create behavior change related to arts participation? The California Arts Council and its new Arts Marketing Institute believes it can and is preparing to prove it.

The California Arts Council (CAC) is one of 13 state arts agencies across the nation to receive an important grant from the Wallace Readers-Digest Funds, State Arts Partnership for Cultural Participation (START). The program is intended to help states increase the public's involvement in the arts. Of the \$9.6 million in START funding distributed by Wallace RDF nationally, only California is using its \$600,000 over three years to create a new division of the CAC, an Arts Marketing Institute (AMI), that will use the proven techniques of social marketing to advance the arts and public participation. CAC Director Barry Hessinius and the Arts Council embrace this approach as critical to the future of the arts in California and to the well being of the people of California.

According to Paul Minicucci, Deputy Director of the CAC who oversees the work of the AMI, "The Institute is essential to building new audiences and deepening the participation of active audiences. We also want to increase citizen participation in making art both as professionals and as an avocation." This approach posits a new way of providing services to the field: arts organizations will become the state's "partners" and CAC grantees will be asked to report back on what steps they've taken to increase public participation. By identifying the people of California as the CAC's clients, rather than the artists or arts organization, a persuasive argument for arts funding is born. Reframing it this way helps policymakers and taxpayers understand that arts are a public benefit. It allows legislators to connect the funding to something they value: the support of the voters in their districts, a far larger constituency than the artists!

The AMI began taking shape this past November with my hiring and the selection of seven Fellows, experts in their fields who form a community of practice and learning. Working with the California Assembly of Local Arts Agencies (CALAA) as the service delivery agency, AMI Fellows will be the state's marketing experts in the field. They will work in various regions of the state to train and assist organizations in developing messages and campaigns aimed at 'deepening, diversifying and broadening' public

participation in the arts. With the goal of “normalizing” arts participation, they will craft a social marketing campaign to position the arts part of everyday life. We expect this to be a catalytic process resulting in systemic and sustainable change in the way art is thought about and engaged in throughout California.

BROADEN, DEEPEN, DIVERSIFY

The CAC and AMI will use as their guide a model suggested in ‘A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts’ by Kevin McCarthy and Kimberly Jinnett, otherwise known as ‘the RAND study.’ This model calls for broadening, deepening and diversifying the arts experience for audiences, for stewards and for artists. Clearly this is an ambitious project that will require more time than the life of a three-year grant. Most social marketing campaigns take years to succeed. Tenacity rules when it comes to social marketing. While it’s difficult to measure success during such a campaign, we hope to identify milestones along the way.

To get into the ‘broaden, deepen and diversify’ model, try this exercise. Put together a small working group; draw a large square on a wall board or flip chart and divide it into nine cells. Across the top write Broaden, Deepen and Diversify. Down the left side write Audiences, Artists and Stewards. Brainstorm for each cell. What would it look like to deepen the arts experience for artists, or diversify the arts experience for audiences or stewards?

Deepening the experience for actors might occur if they were able to earn a wage that allowed them to quit their day jobs and use the time instead to take classes to enhance their craft. In turn, this could deepen the theatre-going experience for audiences who then tell their friends and neighbors. The increased attendance and revenue it generates can be used to improve the actor’s salary. This feedback loop has many permutations within the nine cells.

There may be a myriad of approaches to increase participation in the arts, but we choose social marketing as our key strategy. How does social marketing work? It places an emphasis on theory and research, analyzing behavior to determine how to position messages that connect with the targets’ personal values and their larger sense of shared community purpose. It requires shaping a vision of what you want to see happen; modeling behaviors you want to see occur in relation to the vision; developing a message; forming partnerships with other groups in order to share the vision and message while shaping a shared vocabulary. These partners in turn promulgate the process as they speak to their constituencies. Like widening circles in a pond, the message spreads.

When I was three years old, I unknowingly engaged in a social marketing effort, using music to express my message. I composed a song and banged it out on my parent’s upright piano. ‘Put the Cigarette in the Ashtray’ was the name of my ditty and looking back now on my chain-smoking parents – Lucky Strikes it was – and thinking of the billows of second hand smoke I inhaled, I realize my little song was an effort to get the two adults who formed my world to change. But they did not and, as such things often

go, I grew up to become a smoker myself, making no effort to change my own behavior until my city, Berkeley, passed one of the first anti-smoking laws in the nation.

The idea of not being able to light up as I drank a cup of coffee following a meal in one of my favorite Gourmet Ghetto spots seemed so terrible a prospect, I decided to stop smoking rather than stop going to restaurants. Or, worse, getting into fights with waiters. It was not easy. But I was motivated to change. I hated my morning cough and feared lung cancer. Behavior change theory would identify me as an ‘inclined,’ someone ready to quit smoking; the city’s new law simply nudged me to make a change that was in alignment with my own values: personal health and good food at good restaurants. The larger social benefit, clean air for all.

In both scenarios, my childhood home and my adult status as a smoker/restaurant goer, social marketing was at work. In the first case, I was trying to deliver a message that would connect with the values I knew my parents held about my wellbeing. But in the 1940s, second-hand smoke was not considered a hazard. Nor was first-hand smoke, for that matter! So my message was premature. Yes, they wanted to care for me, but their ideas of what that entailed had to do with making sure I took my daily spoonfull of cod liver oil (ugh), insisting I eat the pale and mushy green peas piled on my plate (double ugh) and avoiding public swimming pools to reduce my chance of catching polio.

In the second scenario, a city law prohibiting smoking in restaurants was a change effort by government to improve air quality for the health of patrons and workers and, not coincidentally, the health of smokers. Legislative action to force behavior change is quite effective and usually comes after a long grassroots social marketing effort. For example, the campaign for nonsmokers’ rights took 18 years in California.

Research, always a key part of social marketing, will help the AMI determine what messages to deliver to what target groups based on what values they hold; it also will help arts organizations in the field discover what changes to make in the way they offer their product: convenience factors, starting times, price, barriers to access. Social marketing itself involves elements of traditional marketing, advocacy, education, advertising, the use of mavens (read Malcom Gladwell’s *The Tipping Point*) and other techniques to bring about change. At the same time, the 4 P’s of traditional marketing remain relevant for organizations to promote themselves and their events.

NOT A ‘GOT MILK CAMPAIGN?’

Social marketing encourages a change in behavior by connecting with someone’s existing value(s) and linking the change to a larger social value. Social marketing is not a ‘Got Milk?’ campaign, as someone invariably concludes in nearly all introductory discussions about social marketing. Awareness campaigns such as Got Milk may connect with a personal value—I like to wash down my chocolate cake with big gulps of milk – but there is no larger social value such as in wearing a seatbelt; you save your own life (a personal value) and help reduce the costly slaughter on the nation’s roads and highways (a social value). By attending a dance performance you experience stimulating music and

movement (a personal value) and participate in a shared community event (a social value). Social marketing seeks a whole range of behavior changes that could have a profound impact on how society thinks about, supports, and engages with the arts.

Like most who work in the field, we believe the arts are good for people, good for society. We need to identify the evidence that reinforces the public benefit argument and find the language to articulate it effectively. In too many cases we have been content to create art and assume that its intrinsic value will manifest and draw an audience. There are some who continue to believe art should not have to be marketed. But the 'art for art's sake' argument is outmoded. It creates actual harm by failing to make the case for art as a public benefit that everyone deserves. In failing to make our case for public value we leave ourselves vulnerable to marginalization and budget cuts.

If we believe that arts connects us to our humanity and to one another, that art saves lives, that art represents the creative wellspring that exists in each of us, that art ... fill in the blank. We must find a way to assert these beliefs so that others can understand. If, as the pundits say, the age of irony is over, good. Maybe it's time for the age of creative expression. Part of the AMI's mission will be to develop a vocabulary that allows us to speak about the value of art with passion and conviction, no apologies.

One starting point might be this assertion: "the arts are an essential public good, critical to a healthy society as a source of personal enrichment and a locus for building community." This is the belief statement for a research project on the use of social marketing in the arts that I co-led while at Theatre Bay Area, in partnership with then-executive director Sabrina Klein, who is now a Fellow with the AMI. Theatre Bay Area's research provided a positive answer to the question, can social marketing be used to build support for the arts? The findings of that study inform the work of the AMI and can be found in a report at www.theatrebayarea.org. To learn more about social marketing in connection with the AMI go to the CAC Web site at www.cac.ca.gov, click on Arts Marketing Institute and then click on Weekly Updates.

What would it look like if art were more central to our lives? We might see arts education restored fully to the schools, K-thru 12. More news and reviews about the arts in the media, including on the nightly news. Cities requiring "Arts Impact Reports" on proposed development projects. Tax incentives for artists and supportive public policies. Public outcry when the arts are cut or slighted at budget time. Individuals discovering the creative artist in themselves. Artists, not media "personalities" as cultural heroes. More individuals serving as arts advocates, volunteers and board members. The arts as a "normal" part of everyday life.

The AMI Fellows were selected for their expertise in five areas: social marketing, cultural tourism, research and analysis, special populations and Web marketing/distance learning. They will shape a strategic plan for a social marketing campaign aimed at changing the behavior among arts non-users and light users around the state with a focus on special populations, arts education and cultural tourists, 81% of whom in California are Californians.

Implementing the plan involves considerable training and skills transfer with our partners, the state and local arts agencies. These partners in turn will carry the work forward with their own constituencies. Next year we will devise an advertising campaign aimed at connecting with people's value schemes, e.g., "I like doing things with my family. Going to a museum is something my family and I can do together." Participation includes the obvious: going to a museum or attending a performance. But it also includes the less obvious, such as reading the script before going to a play, visiting the Website of the theatre, staying for a discussion after the performance, taking an adult arts class, making a donation, purchasing works of art, singing part in a community chorus, and in general talking about the arts as comfortably as we talk about last night's Lakers game. If done correctly, social marketing will provoke individuals to formulate their own lengthy list of outcomes.

While social marketing can seem vague, too science-driven, touchy-feely, too complex, consider this: it works. Each of us can carry these concepts into the arts realm by inviting a neighbor to a concert or asking an office mate to join us at a play. Just as 'only you can prevent forest fires,' only you can make the arts a part of everyday life.

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